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The Idea of God in Amos.

BY PROF. H. G. MITCHELL.

IT was not in the nature of Amos to deal in abstractions or to pay much heed to the canons of logic. He had not been trained to systematic thinking. His mission did not require him to assume new habits. One cannot therefore expect to find in his book a complete theology. What he thought of God must rather to a large extent be gathered from his practical instruction and the result reduced to scientific order.

This task is not so difficult as it might appear, for however rude in speech, as in appearance, he may have been, it must be admitted that he has remarkably clear ideas on the subjects which he discusses, and that these ideas are expressed with force as well as fervor. There is therefore no trouble in understanding him. Moreover, though he seldom makes a direct statement, it is easy enough, from his warnings and exhortations, to learn what to his mind was the character of him in whose name he prophesied. The rest is purely a matter of arrangement.

The importance of knowing what Amos thought about God appears when one considers his place in the history of the chosen people. He is the first of the writing prophets, and therefore, though the golden age of Hebrew history had long passed, he preceded by a considerable interval the attempts at reform by which the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah are characterized. Perhaps it will yet be found possible through his work to reach a satisfactory conclusion with reference to the development (if this be the proper word) of the Hebrew religion.

The name by which Amos most frequently refers to him whom he claimed to represent is אֲנִי. This he uses in every variety of thought and construction—no fewer than fifty-two times.¹ Once,

¹ i. 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 13, 15; ii. 1, 3, 4², 6, 11, 16; iii. 1, 6, 10, 12, 15; iv. 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11; v. 4, 6, 8, 17, 18², 20; vi. 10, 11; vii. 3², 6, 8, 15², 17; viii. 2, 7, 11, 12; ix. 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 15.

and only once, at the end of the promise with which the book closes (ix. 15), this name is supplemented by the tender designation so frequent in Deuteronomy, **אלהיך**. The name **אלהים**, on the other hand, occurs but once alone as a proper name, viz. iv. 11, where it is used in a phrase exactly reproduced in Isa. xiii. 19:—

במהפכת אלהים את־סדרם ואת־עמריה

These words sound like a quotation, yet not from the account of the destruction of the cities of the plain in Gen. xix., which is Jehovistic, excepting v. 19, where, however, the verb is **שהת** instead of **הפך**. Deut. xxix. 22 omits the name of the deity, but the immediate context has **יהוה**. A third name, **אדני**, is found three times,—vii. 7 and 8; ix. 1. In the first and last of these passages God is represented as appearing to the prophet in a visible shape. In the second there is no such reason for employing a peculiar word. Indeed, **יהוה** is used in the same verse and in precisely the same connection. It is possible, however, that v. 8 originally had **יהוה יהוה** twice, since many of Kennicott's codices have this reading. **אדני** would thus stand for the visible manifestation of the deity to Amos.

The most frequent compound name for God used by Amos is **אדני יהוה**. It occurs nineteen times.¹ In some cases one can see a reason for its use: e.g. when it is found in oaths, as iv. 2;² vi. 8; asseverations, as iii. 7 and 8; ix. 8;³ also iii. 11, and according to the Septuagint, v. 3 after **לכן**; perhaps viii. 9 and 11.⁴ In the remaining instances, most of which are in chapters vii. and viii., there seems to be no reason why **יהוה** alone was not employed. In most of them the Septuagint has only *κυριος*.

A still more solemn and impressive designation for the deity is formed by the addition of **צבאות**, with or without the article, to more common combinations. Thus **יהוה אלהי צבאות** is used seven times,⁵ once, xv. 16, with the further addition of **אדני**, while **אדני יהוה הצבאות** occurs ix. 5 and **יהוה אלהי הצבאות** iii. 13. One should, however, compare with these passages v. 8 and ix. 6, where a simple **יהוה** is used.⁶

¹ i. 8; iii. 7, 8, 11; iv. 2, 5; v. 3; vi. 8; vii. 1, 2, 4², 5, 6; viii. 1, 3, 9, 11; ix. 8.

² Compare, however, viii. 7.

³ Compare iii. 10.

⁴ Compare vi. 11.

⁵ iv. 13; v. 14, 15, 16, 27; vi. 8, 14.

⁶ See Ex. iii. 15; xv. 3.

Amos habitually used the name **יהוה**, the name by which God is said to have revealed himself to the Hebrews, but he does not limit the power and dominion of Jehovah to the Promised Land. It was Jehovah who made the earth and all that it contains, or, in the words of the prophet, "formed the mountains and created the wind."¹ Nay, the God of the Hebrews is the one that made the "Pleiades and Orion," or, as the Septuagint puts it, "all things."² This "universal frame" is his abode; he fills it and every part of it, for though he manifests himself especially in the holy city, "roareth from Zion and uttereth his voice from Jerusalem,"³ he "buildeth his chambers in the heavens, and he hath founded his vault upon the earth."⁴

He governs the world.

His hand appears in all the phases and processes of nature. He "turneth gloom into morning and darkeneth day into night, he summoneth the waters of the sea and poureth them out upon the face of the earth."⁵ His power is especially apparent in the control which he exercises over nature to the advantage or disadvantage of man. If he so wills, the earth produces with such abundance that "the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop must, and all the hills flow."⁶ At his command, also, nature refuses to respond to the efforts of man and transforms itself into a terrible enemy. Now follows famine throughout the land,⁷ or drought such that men wander from place to place for water unsatisfied.⁸ Sometimes blasting and mildew destroy the grain, and locusts devour vineyards, and fig and olive orchards, while pestilence carries man and beast to destruction.⁹ Nor is this the worst, for the very earth next rocks and gapes, and, as in the day when Sodom and Gomorrah were overthrown, threatens utterly to devour its inhabitants.¹⁰ Indeed, Amos does not shrink from the broad doctrine implied in the question, "If calamity befall a city, — hath not Jehovah done it?"¹¹

Jehovah is the God of all *men* as well as all *things*. The declaration, "you only have I known of all the families of the earth,"¹² which at first seems to contradict the general tone of the book, is corrected and limited by another passage properly translated: "Are ye not as the children of the Kushites unto me, children of Israel, saith Jehovah? If I brought Israel up from the land of Egypt, did I not also bring the Philistines from Kaphtor, and Aram from Kir?"¹³ Two other

¹ iv. 11.

² v. 8.

³ i. 2.

⁴ ix. 6.

⁵ v. 8; see iv. 13; ix. 6.

⁶ ix. 13.

⁷ iv. 6.

⁸ iv. 7 f.

⁹ iv. 9 f.

¹⁰ iv. 11.

¹¹ iii. 6.

¹² iii. 2.

¹³ ix. 7.

passages may be similarly made to explain and supplement each other. In one Jehovah is represented as saying, "I destroyed the Amorites before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and who were strong as the oaks, yet I destroyed their fruit above and their roots beneath. I also brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and led you forty years in the desert to possess the land of the Amorites."¹ The other is a threat hurled at Israel: "Behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, saith Jehovah the God of hosts; and they shall afflict you from the entrance to Hamath to the stream of the Arabah."² These citations show that Amos claims for his God that he determines the destinies of the nations of the earth. This is still more forcibly taught at the beginning of the book in the arraignment, one after another, of not only Judah and Israel, but of all the peoples in their vicinity.³ Indeed, Egypt, and perhaps originally Assyria,⁴ are summoned to witness the sins of Samaria and profit by her misfortunes.⁵ The purpose of Jehovah, however, is not utterly destructive. He promises to restore Judah. Nor does his generous purpose include only Judah. Indeed, the Jews are promised restoration "that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations which are called by my name,"⁶ or, according to the interpretation of James and the Septuagint, "that the residue of men may seek after the Lord and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called."⁷

The omniscience of Jehovah is taught where he is described as the one who "declareth unto man what is his thought,"⁸ and his omnipotence in that other passage where he is represented as the one who "causeth destruction to burst upon the strong, so that destruction cometh upon the fortress."⁹ Most graphically, however, are these awful attributes displayed in the last chapter, where the prophet, to show the impossibility of escaping Jehovah's wrath, puts into his mouth these words: "Though they break into Sheol, thence shall my hand fetch them; and though they climb unto heaven, thence will I bring them down; and though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, there will I hunt, and thence will I fetch them; and though they conceal themselves from mine eyes at the bottom of the sea, there at my command shall the dragon bite them; and though they go into captivity before their enemies, there at my command shall the sword slay them. Yea, I will set mine eye upon them

¹ ii. 9 f.² vi. 14.³ i. 3 — ii. 6.⁴ So the Septuagint. ⁵ iii. 9.⁶ ix. 12.⁷ Acts xv. 17.⁸ iv. 13.⁹ v. 9.

for evil, and not for good. For the Lord Jehovah of hosts is he at whose touch the earth melted, and all who dwell on it mourn; it riseth like the Nile, the whole of it, and falleth like the Nile of Egypt; he who buildeth his chambers in the heavens and who hath founded his vault upon the earth; he who summoneth the waters of the sea and poureth them out upon the face of the earth, Jehovah is his name."¹

It is this omnipresent and omnipotent being in whose hand the prophet felt himself when he was taken from Tekoa and his flock, and commanded: "Go prophesy unto my people Israel";² and when at Bethel, confronting the reckless devotees of a false and foul religion, he exclaimed: "The lion hath roared, who should not fear? The Lord Jehovah hath spoken, who can but prophesy?"³

Jehovah is not merely the supreme, he is the only God. This is nowhere in the Book of Amos distinctly asserted, but it is plainly implied in the attributes which have already been found ascribed to him. There are other passages which indicate that the prophet would not admit a rival deity. In Israel, at least, there was no room for any other than Jehovah. They, therefore, who seek to introduce other objects of worship are severely condemned. "They that swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, 'As thy God, O Dan, liveth'; and 'As the way of Beersheba liveth'; even they shall fall and not again arise."⁴ There is another passage which, when properly rendered, yields the same result, viz.: "Take, then, Sikkuth your king, even Kiyun your star-god, the images which ye have made yourselves, and I will lead you into captivity beyond Damascus, saith Jehovah, whose name is the God of hosts."⁵ In this latter passage there is not only the thought that Saturn is an intruder in the land of Israel, but the further thought that this so-called god is not, after all, a real divinity, but a mere image, wood or stone, without power to help or harm its worshippers. The falsity and worthlessness of all gods but Jehovah seems also to be taught, *e.g.*, in the charge against Judah: "The lies, after which their fathers went, have led them also astray";⁶ perhaps even in the expression in which the sons of Israel are described as "those who rejoice in a thing which is not."⁷ Hence, the exhortation, "Seek not Bethel, nor go to Gilgal, nor cross to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall become naught."⁸ The promise at the close of the

¹ ix. 2-6.² vii. 15.³ iii. 8.⁴ viii. 14.⁵ v. 26 f.⁶ ii. 4.⁷ vi. 13.⁸ v. 5.

book¹ implies that these gods will eventually be destroyed, and Jehovah reign without the semblance of a rival.

The moral attributes of Jehovah are not less clearly depicted than the natural by Amos in his book. Indeed, the most striking characteristic of this message from God is its elevated morality. The attribute of holiness is especially prominent. In two instances Jehovah is distinctly declared holy. The licentiousness of Israel, young and old, is, according to the prophet, practised with the purpose of profaning his "holy name."² When he would confirm a threat with an oath, he swears "by his holiness" as by the essential element of his divine nature.³

The same attribute reveals itself only a little less directly in passages without number. Oftenest it is that form of holiness more precisely termed justice or righteousness which is implied. All those passages in which Jehovah is represented as condemning injustice or unrighteousness might be cited in this connection. The first words addressed to Israel, after the arraignment of the other nations, are of this nature. Jehovah condemns them "because they sell the righteous for money and the needy for a pair of shoes; pant for dust of the earth on the heads of the weak, and thrust the humble aside in their way," etc.⁴ These charges are often repeated. The Egyptians and Philistines (or Assyrians) are summoned to Samaria to "see the multiplied tumult within it and the oppression in its midst."⁵ As "kine of Bashan" the Samaritans are described as oppressing the weak and trampling upon the needy.⁶ They "trample upon the poor and take from him tribute of wheat";⁷ they "oppress the righteous, take bribes, and thrust aside the needy in the gate."⁸ Indeed, such is the state of things that one cannot hope for justice, for these wicked nobles of the capital "turn judgment to wormwood and keep righteousness on the ground."⁹ One of the most vivid pictures of the dishonesty of Israel, is that in which Amos says: "Hear this, ye who pant after the needy, and to destroy the humble of the land, saying, When will the new moon pass, that we may sell grain? and the sabbath, that we may open wheat? making the ephah small, and the shekel large, and using false balances; buying the weak for money, and the needy for a pair of shoes — that we may sell the refuse of the wheat?"¹⁰ The case seems to be summed up in the assertion: "They know not how to do right";¹¹ and the most aggravated form of unrighteousness

¹ ix. 12.² ii. 7.³ iv. 2; comp. vi. 8.⁴ ii. 6 f.⁵ iii. 9.⁶ iv. 1.⁷ v. 11.⁸ v. 12.⁹ v. 7; see vi. 12.¹⁰ viii. 4-6.¹¹ iii. 10.

to be described in the complaint: "They hate in the gate one who reproveth, and one who speaketh uprightly they abhor."¹ This unsparing inquisition and uncompromising condemnation of the injustice and oppression of Israel leave no doubt with reference to the character of Jehovah. The conviction that "judgment and righteousness are the foundation of his throne" is only deepened by the exhortations to which the prophet now and then gives utterance. "Seek good, and not evil," he pleads, "that ye may live; and so Jehovah the God of hosts shall be with you, as ye say. Hate evil and love good, and establish judgment in the gate; it may be that Jehovah the God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph."² Such an exhortation is also interjected into the final sentence pronounced against the impenitent people. They are once more offered pardon, if they will "let judgment roll as water, and righteousness as a mighty stream."³ There is no book in the Old Testament in which the righteousness of Israel's God is more strongly emphasized than in that of Amos.

There are in this book but scant references to a side of the holiness of Jehovah which is made very prominent in some other parts of the Hebrew history, viz., his faithfulness. Yet this is implied not only in the condemnation of Tyre, because they "remembered not the covenant of brethren," but also in the appeals to Hebrew history, and the promise with which the faithful in Israel are comforted. When Amos puts into the mouth of Jehovah the words "You only have I known of all the families of the earth," he evidently refers to the covenant which the Hebrews believed to have been made with their forefathers. It was in fulfilment of his part in this covenant that Jehovah brought his people "up out of the land of Egypt."⁴ The same compact is also assumed in the record of the chastisements with which Jehovah afflicted Israel,⁵ though they were thus only hardened in their rebellion against him. Finally, he reveals himself faithful to his word to the fathers when he says: "So I will command, and I will toss the house of Israel among the nations as one tosses with a sieve, yet shall not a grain fall to the ground";⁶ and in that brighter promise, "I will raise up the fallen hut of David and wall up its breaches; I will raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in ancient days. . . . I will restore my captive people Israel . . . and I will plant them upon their land, that they shall no more be uprooted from their land which I gave them, saith Jehovah, thy

¹ v. 10.² v. 14 f.³ v. 24.⁴ ii. 10.⁵ iv. 6-11.⁶ ix. 9.

God.”¹ Significant in this connection are the phrases, “return unto me,” “my people,” “their land,” and especially from its position at the very end of the book, the reassuring expression, “thy God.” These last words are a token that though he chastise them, Jehovah has not forgotten his covenant with his chosen, the seed of faithful Abraham.

One cannot deny that the picture of Jehovah drawn by Amos is thus stern in its outlines. It is not, however, without its tender features, — features the more tender because parts of the same whole with the sterner lineaments. While, therefore, Jehovah, according to Amos, is above all holy, righteous, he is a God whose nature it is to love his creatures. This tender attribute shows itself in a variety of forms.

He is good, not merely to his peculiar people, to whom, in fulfilment of his gracious purpose concerning them, he sent prophets as teachers and Nazarites as examples of virtue,² but to all men; for it was he who led the heathen as well as the children of Israel in their wanderings.³ Perhaps there is no stronger expression of the benevolent purpose of Jehovah than the exhortation, “Seek me and live.”⁴ It is the invitation of one who waits with hands full of blessings and watches for those who will receive them. There is nothing in the book to contradict this impression. To those who do not forfeit all claim to his favor, Jehovah can only do good without measure.

Jehovah is pitiful, else he would not so severely have condemned the Syrians and others for the opposite quality — Damascus is doomed, because its people “threshed Gilead with iron-shod *moregs*”;⁵ Gaza, because the Philistines “led an entire people captive to deliver them to Edom”;⁶ Edom, “because he pursued his brother with the sword, stifling his pity, while his wrath ever rent, and his fury he nursed without ceasing”;⁷ and the children of Ammon, “because they disembowelled the pregnant women of Gilead that they might enlarge their borders.”⁸ The most touching evidence of the tenderness of the heart of Jehovah, however, is found in the lament in which the prophet bewails the fate of Israel when it is too late to save his people:

“Fallen, not to rise again; is the Virgin Israel;
Hurled upon her soil, with none to raise her up!”⁹

One can hardly repeat it without punctuating it with sobs.

¹ ix. 11–15.

² ii. 11.

³ ix. 7.

⁴ v. 4.

⁵ i. 3.

⁶ i. 6.

⁷ i. 11.

⁸ i. 13.

⁹ v. 2.

Finally Jehovah is merciful. Of this fact there are proofs on every page of the Book of Amos. As one reads the arraignment of Israel one wonders that they were allowed to add sin to sin, as they did, without utter destruction. Yet Jehovah spared them. He warned them by his prophets, for "the Lord Jehovah will do nothing except he reveal his purpose unto his prophets,"¹ and though they despised reproof and attempted to silence his messengers, he did not forsake them. He chastised them with famine, and other calamities, and, though they did not then return to their allegiance,² his mercy triumphed over his justice, and he did not destroy them. The exhortations mingled among Amos' denunciations are the expressions of Jehovah's mercy. He is loath even at the last to punish them as they deserve. Indeed, it would seem as if, when Amos spoke and wrote, his patience was not entirely exhausted, for the prophet foretold further exhibitions of the mercy hitherto abused. This is the meaning of the series of visions with which the seventh chapter begins. The locusts first and the fire afterwards threaten to destroy the land, but at the intercession of the prophet it is spared, and only when the people persist in their rebellion is the plumb-line dropped in the midst of Israel³ and their doom as a people finally sealed.

Such is Jehovah as he revealed himself to his servant the prophet Amos. That this revelation actually occurred is repeatedly asserted. The prophet declares that he was taken from his flocks by Jehovah, that he was taught by Jehovah what he should say to Israel, and finally that he was shown the Lord in threatening attitude toward his people. One may, however, maintain the reality of the revelation asserted, without necessarily insisting upon a literal interpretation of the prophet's words. Amos probably does not mean to assert that he was actually seized by a visible hand and hurried away on his mission, or that at any time he was actually addressed by his God in an audible voice; least of all that he was permitted with his natural eye to see Jehovah as described. He saw the Lord in symbolical visions, — with the eye of his spirit. He doubtless felt and heard him in like manner through his spiritual senses. Internally impelled, he undertook his dangerous duty, and God spoke through him to Jeroboam and his godless subjects.

Nor is the Power, to whose control Amos says that he is consciously subject, unworthy of the name of God. He is the same who is so impressively announced in the history of the Exodus: "Jehovah,

¹ iii. 7.

² iv. 6–11.

³ vii. 1–8.

Jehovah, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in grace and truth; keeping grace for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin; yet by no means acquitting, but visiting iniquity of fathers upon children and grandchildren, upon third and fourth generations";¹ the same of whom Jesus said to the woman of Samaria: "God is a spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."²

¹ Ex. xxxiv. 6 f.

² John iv. 24.